

story about being alone with her coachman, dusting! She did not seem to be a woman capable of murder, but there was something strange about her manner. She was hiding—*something*.

The two files of electric lamps, drawn up along the curbs, lit a deserted street. The houses were a row of closed doors and darkened windows—sightless and deaf things of stone. He was going through a sleeping city—to what?

Well, in any event, he must go. It was his only hope of retrieving a fortune that had fallen on vagabondage and sleeping in the Park. He walked doggedly beside the swish of feminine draperies and the click of a high heel, looking down at her shadow as it wheeled and floated across the flagstones under the corner light.

The blackness of the side street blotted out her silhouette. She said suddenly: "Why are you making all this trouble for yourself—and for me?"

"Well, another person," he defended himself, "might have made more for you and less for himself. You could be arrested for throwing that thing into the Park, for example."

She turned on him, in a plaintive indignation. "I don't see why you're doing it at all."

"I'm a reporter," he replied.

Her foot scraped on the sidewalk in a way that told him the information was not only unexpected, but startling. She caught her gait again at once, but she proceeded in a silence which, he knew, was busy with thought.

She said at last: "You're going to write about it?"

"I'm a reporter," he said, "but I hope I am also a gentleman. I have to satisfy myself—"

"I told you how it happened," she protested.

"You told me a contradictory story," he replied.

"It was true—most of it."

He hastened to say: "I quite believe you. I only wish to be satisfied that your husband is a physician—and that your parcel contained nothing—criminal."

She replied helplessly: "Very well. Here's the house."

### III.

It was an old brown-stone residence of five stories, with a flight of stone steps let down from the first floor to the sidewalk, and a servants' entrance tunnelled under them into the basement. He could see no doctor's sign anywhere displayed, and the whole house was dark except for a basement window in which a streak of light showed, like an open seam, between the sash and the blind. They went down two steps into the area. She reached up to take a key from a ledge beside the grated basement doorway. And when he passed in after her, she turned to fling the door shut behind him with an ominous clang and rattle of its iron lattice.

He followed her thoughtfully, into a lighted room; and there, as if the lamp flashed it on him, he remembered that ring shining on the dead hand. It was impossible to believe that a surgeon's knife—

His teeth bit together on the thought. He looked up at her, pale and staring, and he found her fumbling at the pins of her hat and studying him under the brim of it. His eyes held hers in a fascinated gaze that seemed at last to frighten her. She dropped her hands. "Well?" she said.

He darted a stealthy glance around him, alert to his danger; and by virtue, perhaps, of that alertness, he recognized the room as a servants' reception-room, from the way in which it was furnished with the cast-off upholstery of upstairs.

"Well?" he heard her say.

He turned to see that she had retreated to get the table between them, and had left his way clear to the door. He started towards it.

"No!" she cried. "No! You can't leave here until you promise you'll not write anything about me."

He faced around to the threat in her tone.

"I'm not the doctor's wife," she said. "I'm—his housekeeper."

She was red. He swallowed, but could not speak.